

THREE CREEKS #2 TIMBER SALE

December 17, 2007 Land Board

This project is the second of four timber sales proposed under the Three Creeks EIS.

Location of Sale:

- Swan Unit (NWLO) – Approximately 7 air miles south of Swan Lake, Montana
- Lake County – Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 15, 16 of T24N, R17W
- 100% Common School Trust.

Sale Volume & Estimated Value:

- The estimated volume is 36,071 tons (6,361 MBF) with an estimated minimum value of \$676,331.00 or \$18.75/ton.
- In addition to the stumpage value, a fee of \$4.81/ton for Forest Improvement will be charged for all merchantable sawlog timber harvested.
- 5.67 tons/MBF is the estimated conversion factor.

Sale & Harvest Treatments:

- The sale consists of 9 harvest units totaling 649 acres.
- Silvicultural prescriptions include:
 - 248 acres of commercial thinning. Commercial thinning would leave 80 – 110 trees per acre representing a variety of size and age classes.
 - 142 acres of shelterwood harvest. Shelterwood harvest would leave 12 – 16 medium to large trees per acre either singly or in small groups.
 - 110 acres of seed tree and 115 acres of seed tree with reserves. Seed tree harvest and seed tree harvest with reserves would leave 6 – 8 medium to large trees per acre. The five reserve areas are small unharvested patches of timber within specific seed tree harvest units. Reserve areas range in size from 2.0 to 4.5 acres. These reserve patches provide a natural seed source, hiding cover for wildlife, and limit site distances for grizzly bears as called for in the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement (SVGBCA).
 - 34 acres of road right-of-way clearing.
- As designed and analyzed by the fisheries biologist in the FEIS, small ¼-acre patch harvest units would be intermittently located within the SMZ/RMZ along a three-quarter mile stretch of South Fork Lost Creek. These small intermittent harvest patches would only be located along the South side of the stream to encourage the regeneration of seral species for improved long-term large woody debris (LWD) recruitment into the stream. Pre- and post-harvest monitoring would be done to determine the effects of these riparian harvest units on fish habitat and populations, stream temperature, large woody debris recruitment, and riparian stand characteristics.
- A minimum of 2 large snags and 2 large snag recruits per acre would be retained in each harvest unit.
- Healthy western white pine, ponderosa pine, western larch, Douglas-fir, and western red cedar would be favored for retention throughout the sale.
- This sale treats 360 acres of old growth. Post-harvest, about 135 acres would still meet the department's definition of old growth while the other 225 acres would not.

- All regeneration (seed tree & shelterwood) and intermediate (commercial thinning) harvest treatments are designed to:
 - address insect and disease issues;
 - promote appropriate species composition and desired future conditions;
 - balance revenue recovery with environmental considerations such as wildlife habitat, watershed health, and soil stability.

Harvest Systems:

- 37% tractor
- 28% skyline
- 35% Helicopter

Road Construction:

- As part of this project; approximately 3.0 miles of new road would be constructed; approximately 10.5 miles of existing road would be reconstructed to meet current BMP's; and approximately 2.0 miles of road would be obliterated. Maintenance or spot improvements would be completed on an additional 18.5 miles of road. After the sale, all forest roads used for this sale would meet current BMPs. Current open/closed road status would not change and all new roads, with the exception of the South Fork Lost Creek re-alignment, would be gated to remain closed to motorized use after the sale is completed. Traffic flow and road use were designed to meet the requirements of the SVGBCA.
- Part of the new construction would be the relocation of approximately 1.67 miles of the South Fork Lost Creek Road. This relocation would move the road away from South Fork Lost Creek and would significantly reduce sediments currently entering the creek. Upon completion of the new construction, the abandoned portion of the South Fork Lost Creek Road that currently borders the creek would be obliterated.

Public Involvement & Issues:

Public scoping for the Three Creeks Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) began on February 3, 2004 with a 45-day public comment period. The project proposal was mailed to interested individuals, owners of adjacent land, State Land Board staff, special interest groups, private industry, State representatives, local newspapers, and federal and state agencies. Public notices were also published in the *Bigfork Eagle*, the *Kalispell Daily Interlake*, and the *Swan Valley Pathfinder*. A news article also appeared in the *Bigfork Eagle*. As a result of these initial scoping efforts, a total of five letters and one phone call were received from a wide range of interested parties.

- In April 2005, DNRC sent out a newsletter to update interested parties about the project. Four responses were received as a result of the newsletter.
- The ID Team conducted two public field tours of the project area in June, 2005. In addition, Land Board staffers toured the project area on September 6, 2005 with a second tour conducted on October 24, 2005.
- The DEIS was prepared and mailed out for comments on August 16, 2006 with a 45-day comment period which closed on October 5, 2006. A total of eight (8) comments to the DEIS were received. A second field tour was requested by Ms. Jane Adams during the DEIS comment period. DNRC staff attempted to schedule the meeting for 9/28/06, but Ms. Adams cancelled and did not request to reschedule.

- Primary concerns by those who commented include: impacts of timber harvesting and road construction on old growth and wildlife habitat, protection of water quality, maintaining biodiversity, project economic viability, and forest health and vigor. These resource concerns and others were addressed and incorporated into the project's design through the development of appropriate mitigation measures and contractual language
- Final EIS published and mailed out on December 18, 2006. Alternative B identified as proposed decision in FEIS with final decision made on January 18, 2007.
- After the publication of the FEIS and before the final decision was made, some individuals/groups requested to meet with department and land board staff to discuss concerns about the Three Creeks Project. Department and/or land board staff met with Arlene Montgomery (FOWS) on January 9, 2007 and January 18, 2007 and with Ann Hedges (MEIC) on January 10, 2007. Department staff also met with the Swan Lands Stakeholder Group on January 11, 2007 to provide an update on the Three Creeks Project and to discuss other efforts in the Swan Valley.

Issues and Mitigations:

- **Old Growth** – Timber management in old growth stands on this sale would concentrate on stands with chronic and widespread insect and disease problems. A total of 360 acres of old growth would be treated as a part of this second sale. Of that total, 135 acres would still meet the department's definition of old growth post-harvest while the other 225 acres would not. This proposed sale would reduce the classified old growth acres on the Swan River State Forest from 12,195 to 11,970 – a reduction of 1.85%. Under Alternative B and upon completion of all four proposed timber sales, old growth acreage on the Swan River State Forest would be reduced from 12,478 acres to 11,914 acres – a reduction of 564 acres or 4.52%. The proportion of the Swan River State Forest that is old growth would decrease from 32.4% to 31.6%, a reduction of 0.8%.

Many of the larger trees in these old growth stands are dead or dying as a result of insect and disease issues. In addition, many of the seral species are declining while shade tolerant species are increasing and moving away from desired future conditions (DFC's). Shelterwood and seed tree harvest treatments in these old growth stands correspond to old growth maintenance and removal treatments (ARM 36.11.418) which are meant to emulate mixed severity and stand replacement fire regimes on these sites. These types of treatments are designed to reduce short and long-term insect and disease problems, increase the presence of seral species (western larch, western white pine, etc.) and reduce the amount of shade tolerant species such as grand fir, balance value recovery of dead and dying trees with environmental considerations, and move these stands toward desired future conditions.

Western white pine, ponderosa pine, western larch, Douglas-fir, and western red cedar would be favored for retention within all harvest units. Leave trees would represent various size and age classes. Stands would move from predominantly shade tolerant or climax species, such as grand fir, to shade intolerant or seral species such as larch, white pine, and Douglas-fir. This would also move these stands towards the department's desired future condition for the Swan River State Forest. This proposed treatment is consistent with the SFLMP and Rules.

- **Wildlife** – Road closures would remain in place. New road construction would occur behind existing closures and be closed to motorized use. Forest connectivity to allow animals to move between areas would be slightly reduced but provided for along riparian corridors and some ridgetops. At least 2 large snags and 2 large snag recruits per acre would be retained after harvest. Thermal cover for deer and elk would be slightly reduced.
- **Threatened and Endangered Species** –
 - **Grizzly Bear** – This sale conforms to the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement. Hiding cover requirements are met through the creation of reserves within cutting units. New roads would be closed to motorized use. Harvest activities are not permitted during the spring season from April 1 through June 15 of each year.
 - **Bull Trout** – SMZ's/RMZ's are part of this timber sale design. No timber harvest is planned within SMZ's/RMZ's along streams with bull trout present except for intermittent harvest along a three-quarter mile section on the South side of South Fork Lost Creek. Unit boundaries have been designed to limit potential impacts to streams and comply with all applicable Rules and Laws.
- **Water Quality/Streams** – Mitigations, such as SMZ's and RMZ's, are an integral part of the sale design and would provide protection to streams within the sale area. These vegetative buffers range from 95 to 150 feet in width and comply with current state laws and requirements. In addition, there is a 25-foot no cut buffer within the SMZ which is beyond what is required under existing laws.

This sale would incorporate a minor amount of timber harvest within the SMZ/RMZ of South Fork Lost Creek. The harvest prescription would call for small intermittent ¼-acre patch harvest units to be harvested with a cable logging system requiring full log suspension to minimize ground disturbance. Approximately 10 small (¼-acre) patch harvest units would be intermittently located along approximately three-quarters of a mile of South Fork Lost Creek on the South side of the stream only. No harvesting would be permitted within 25 feet of the stream and canopy cover for this stretch of the SMZ/RMZ would not fall below 40%. Monitoring during harvest operations by the DNRC Fisheries Biologist and other staff would continually assess the impacts of this harvest and if conditions warranted the harvest prescription would be altered or deferred. The proposed activity complies with all current SMZ laws and Rules.

A direct benefit of this project to stream water quality is the reduction of sediment entering important fish habitat. Two old abandoned bridge crossing sites on South Fork Lost Creek would be removed and rehabilitated as a part of this sale. This work would reduce sediment.

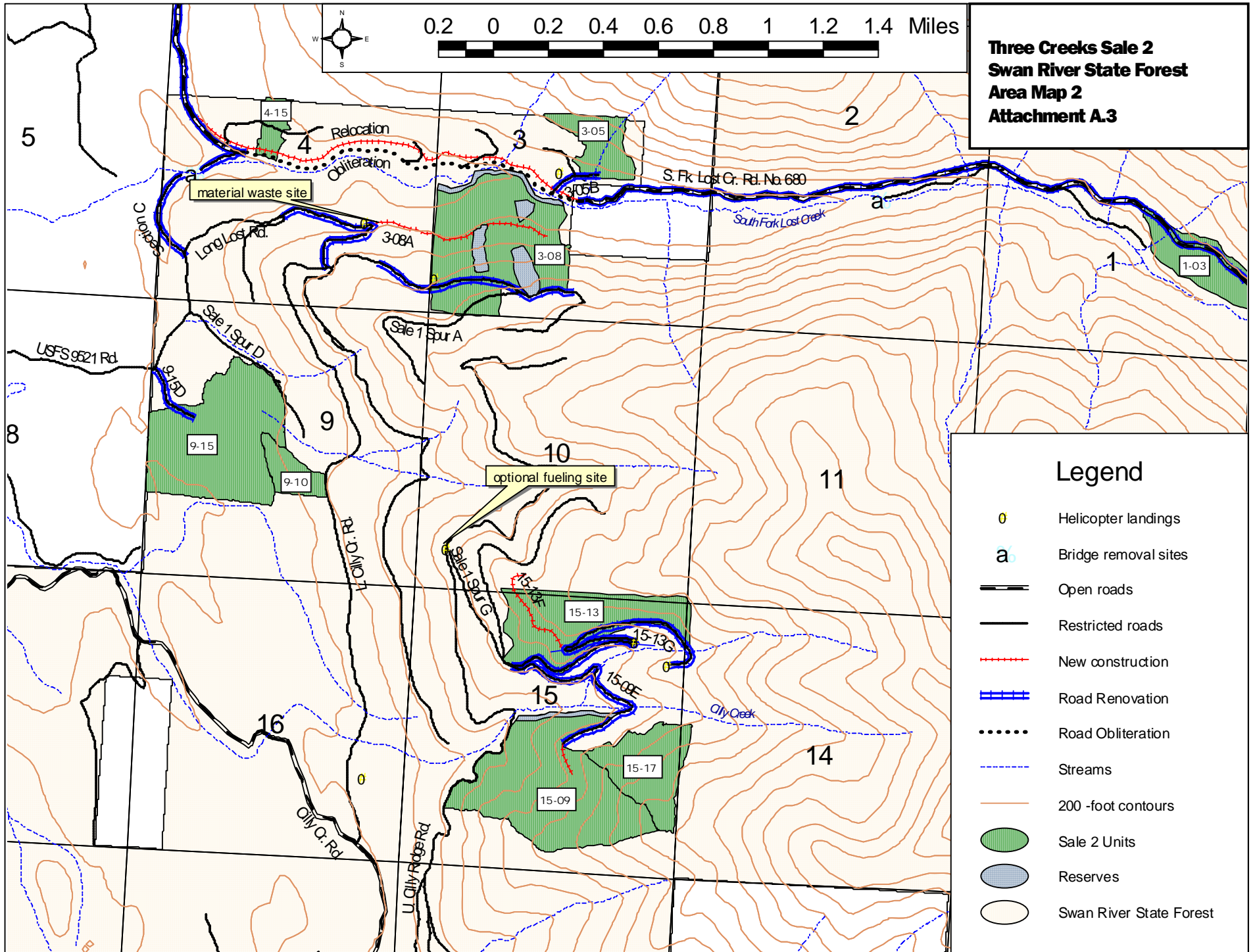
All new road construction and reconstruction would meet current BMP's. After completion of all timber sales and permits, sediment delivery would be reduced on South Fork Lost Creek, Cilly Creek, and Soup Creek as a result of rehabilitating/removing old bridge crossings, removing roads within the SMZ, and improving existing roads.

- **Biodiversity** – The sale harvest prescriptions would have a variety of size and age classes present after harvest. Seral stands would replace the non-typical climax stands

identified for treatment. Harvest prescriptions along with post-harvest burning and planting would contribute to creating a variety of stands that are more reflective of the historic species composition that was present on the landscape.

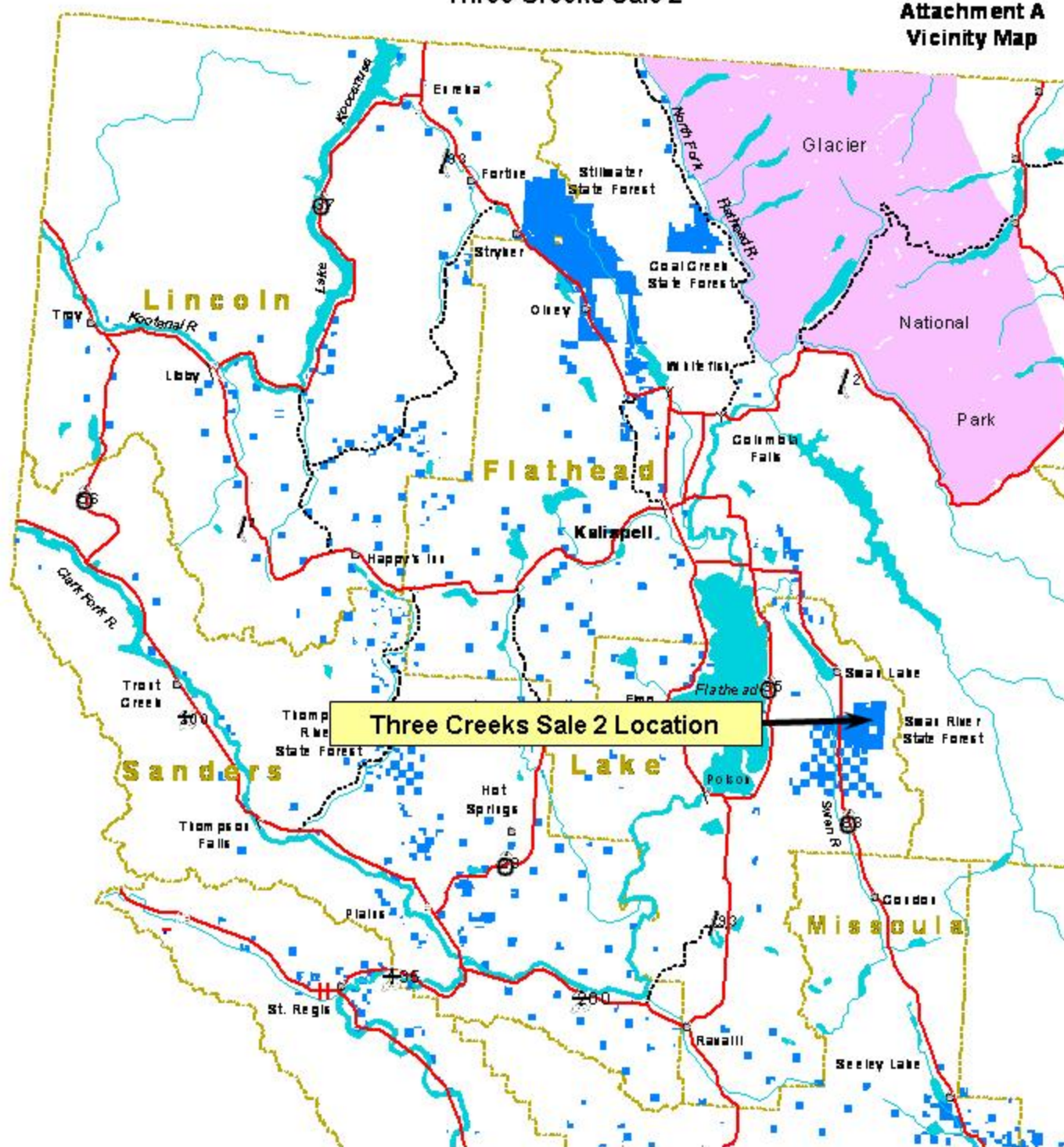
- **Economics** – The sale is expected to generate a minimum of \$676,331.00 for the Common School Trust. The sale would also spur the local economy through creating or sustaining as many as 70 higher paying timber industry related jobs.
- **Forest Health** – This sale is designed to address forest health issues by treating stands with significant insect and disease problems. The stands selected for treatment exhibit poor vigor and growth along with significant mortality due to insect and disease problems. Without treatment, these problems would likely worsen and spread as documented by annual aerial survey flights. Treatments would remove dead and dying or infected trees to allow for healthy trees to take their place or to allow healthy residual trees to grow to full potential.

The Director recommends the Land Board direct the Department to sell the Three Creeks # 2 Timber Sale.



Three Creeks Sale 2

Attachment A Vicinity Map



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|-------------|------------|
| Highways | Lakes |
| Other Roads | Streams |
| County line | State Land |

